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The Gazette (Montreal, Quebec, Canada) · Sat, Oct 28, 1978 · Page 59
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SPIN OFF

Grappelli is master of the jazz violin

Stephane Grappelli is one of those very rare masters who can make listening to music a joyous pleasure. His wonderful jazz violin playing is available on more than 90 record albums, dating from his work with gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt in the early '30s to his latest, *Uptown Dance* (Columbia PC 35415). You'd be hard pressed to find a bad record among them all.

Grappelli, along with the late Joe Venuti, literally defined the art of jazz violin. At age 70 he remains its greatest exponent. He plays with a confident-but-humble style that combines swing with sensivity and a fresh musical curiousity with 50 years of brilliant technical experience.

Uptown Dance puts Grappelli into an interesting context. On alternate cuts he plays with two small and inspired groups, one composed of jazz veterans including drummer Grady Tate and guitarist Jay Berliner, and the other featuring jazz oriented studio musicians such as SteveGadd on drums, and Hugh McCracken on electric guitar. Both groups are backed by an orchestra arranged and conducted beautifully by Claus Ogerman.

Rather than turning the music bland, the orchestra provides a foundation of musical sound that the soloists, especially Grappelli fly and soar above.

Uptown Dance is a very classy record from a musician without very much peers.

— *Mike Regenstreif*

New Bird is flying high

Once or twice a year, an unheralded debut album appears among the stacks of new releases and takes you completely by surprise. Such an album has been released by Dutch Afrikaaner Tony Bird. Titled *Tony Bird of Paradise* (Columbia PC 34988), it's the brightest, freshest and most intelligent folk-pop debut this year.

The first thing noticable about Bird is that he sounds like no one else, immediately making him a unique talent. His voice, with its white African accent, has a strange teror timbre that has to be heard to be appreciated.

His melodies and rhythms are a wonderful mixture of traditional African influences and the imported strains of folk, country and rock music that Bird probably heard on the colonial radio stations in his native Nyasaland (now Malawi).

Bird's songs cover a wide range of expression. He celebrates life in 'Bird Of Paradise,' and the geography and spirit of Africa in 'Zambezi Zimbabwe.' He writes of love lost in 'Nothing But Time,' and love found in 'She Loves Someone.'

Bird uses two very different songs to impart feelings of loneliness. 'Cape Of Flowers,' perhaps the record's most beautiful melody, is filled with lovely images of the and. 'The Mynah Birds' is haunting with its minor melody and direct questions of human awareness. Several songs deal with African and human social issues and their spirit is slightly reminiscent of the topical song boom of the early '60s.

These days it rare to find records with the originality of *Tony Bird of Paradise*. We could use a lot more.

— *Mike Regenstreif*

Nylon strings are fine

Guy Van Duser is a Boston based musician whose debut album, *Finger Style Guitar Solos* (Rounder Records 3021), is an exquisite example of the possibilities of the nylon string guitar.

Van Duser takes on any number of musical forms and makes them all sound great. He plays swing, ragtime, old pop standards, boogie, traditional folk music, Gershwin and a marvelous medley of old TV western themes.

This album, which contains notes of genuine admiration from such celebrated guitarists as Chet Atkins and Eric Schoenberg, is quite possibly the best recording of solo guitar music to be released in the past few years. Anyone interested in great music in general, and the guitar in particular, shouldn't miss it.

— Mike Regenstreit

Young's got some grief

Only Neil Young gets away with the following bleak self-indulgences: "Let me bore you with this story, how my lover let me down."

Over the past dozen years — with the Buffalo Springfield, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, and in his solo ramblings — he has milked life for melancholy, pathos, disillusionment, bitterness. He's not about to stop now that he's arrived at the mellowest recording moment of his career.

Comes a Time is informed with contentment, the wisdom of experience and even a glimmering of happiness — yet Young still predominantly sounds as if he's down in the dumps. His nasal whine struggling to stay in-tune, he sings as if he's in great pain. He's the all-time party-pooper who hauls out a guitar and inflicts his cloudy, repetitive little homilies on life and its unfairness and woe.

Grief: that's what Neil Young is all about.

Yet he's surprisingly effective: one feels moved to pat him on the back. His simple refrains on the new album hang in the air, as if to allow the pained songwriter a chance to let out a sigh. When he sings, with utter resignation, "Still searchin' for that peace of mind," you know he'll never find it.

Instead, on the eminently laid-back *Comes a Time*, he must content himself with bundlingup his anxieties in layers of blankets and comforters. There are no less that eight acoustic guitarists employed to produce the cosy campfire strumming that is the foundation of all Young's songs. It's not ragged but it's loose enough to allow Young to wander and wonder, always accompanied by choice understated fillets of fiddle, vibes and electric guitar.

"Oh," he whines, "this ol' world keeps spinnin' round, It's a wonder tall trees ain't layin' down." Neil doesn't exactly set the world on fire with his Message, yet we know it's not from lack of effort. There is a transcendent quality of relief when he sings, "I feel like goin' back, Back where there's no place to stay."

Huh? Whatever he means, *Comes a Time* represents Young at his most pleasant. Precious few of his songs escape being self-indulgent and his lame voice does everything to keep the listener away. Despite — or maybe because of — this, Young still emerges as a sympathetic rambler, whose elliptical phrases and little-boy-lost delivery can make his legion of fans identify.

— *Juan Rodriguez*

Puppets' style is disconcerting but enjoyable

By MAUREEN PETERSON
of The Gazette

There were some children in the audience at Theatre du Rideau Vert on a recent Sunday afternoon who seemed disappointed that the marionettes didn't have any strings.

I wasn't. In fact I would compliment La compagnie de L'Avant Pays, for searching beyond the familiar puppet techniques and coming up with a style that, while still disconcertingly new, is full of invention and interest.

The show, the first of the season for Rideau Vert's Theatre de la Jeunesse, is called *Il Était Une Fois en Neuve-France* and it mixes a sense of history with a taste of folklore.

There's a snooty French aristocrat, a two-headed Indian diety and even a quartet of evil little *lutins* who like nothing better than bashing their victims to death. But fear not for the tots, no one really gets killed and the brave young hunter marries the beautiful young girl in the end.

The characters are more dolls than marionettes, strictly speaking, and their manipulators are in full view on stage. At times they even take part in the action.

The show's biggest drawback on the other hand involves the costumes of the manipulators. Each wears a pale shirt and a dark vest and when there is more than two of them on stage the backdrop of the action is a disturbing checkerboard.

The show's greatest asset on the other hand is a bit of stage magic that involves a huge cabinet which when opened served as decor for the puppets. It was a delight each time it was re-opened to a reveal a new set. A simple trick but invariably effective.

The performers sing along with a somewhat squeaky soundtrack, but the faults here don't seriously damage the production as a whole.

The plot is easy enough to follow even if you don't grasp all the French text and the plum-eyed dolls are quite endearing.

Warn the kids that the marionettes don't have strings and make reservations if you plan to go. The house was packed Sunday and will likely continue to be so through the season. Performances at 2:30.

Networks assured of Olympics' profit

LOS ANGELES — The 1980 Olympic Games are still more than one year away, but the ABC and NBC television networks are already assured of making a fat profit on them.

Both networks have already sold enough commercials to pay for their production costs. For the 29 days of games that they will cover, both are now doing their bookkeeping in black ink.

ABC will telecast the Winter Olympic Games Feb. 12-24, 1980, in Lake Placid, N.Y. The network announced this month it has sold out all its commercial time at an average price of $135,000 a minute.

NBC will telecast the Summer Olympic Games Jul. 19-Aug. 3, 1980, in Moscow. The network announced this month it has sold 80 percent of its commercial time so far at an average rate of $130,000 a minute.

Despite the hundreds of hours of sports on TV, profits of the type that ABC and NBC expect from the Olympics are very unusual. Events like Super Bowls and World Series are big money-makers, but many other network sports events of the present and past, such as Sunday afternoon football, tewnnis and hockey have been either marginal or red ink operations.

Jim Spence, ABC's senior vice president of sports, figures his network will make a profit of $8 million on the Winter Games. They will cost about $40 million to produce, with $48 million worth of commercials more than paying the bill.

ABC will present 50 hours of Winter Games coverage altogether. Prestige sponsors including Chevrolet, Coca-Cola and Schlitz have already bought all the available advertising time.

While all the money changes hands, sports fans will receive a bonus of seven more hours of TV coverage than ABC gave the 1976 Winter Games in Innsbruck, Austria.

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